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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of 15 years of international study designed to determine the nature of motivational beliefs, values and goals held by students from different cultural groups, the comparability of these beliefs, values, and goals with those promoted by classrooms and schools, and the impact individual, cultural/social, peer, family, class and school influences have on student motivation, achievement, and school retention. The work has been disseminated over the years through a number of scholarly journals in the United States and Australia. Participants have included: (1) 496 Australian Aboriginal students; (2) 1,173 Anglo Australian students; (3) 487 immigrant-background Australian students; (4) 919 Navajo students; (5) 141 Arabic-background Australian students; (6) 198 Betsiamite Canadian Indian students; (7) 1,078 Anglo American students; and (8) 80 Yavapai Indian students. A major finding is that the motivational profiles of these diverse cultural groups are strikingly similar. A narrow range of achievement goals and a sense of self appear important in explaining school achievement on educational criteria. The role of school socialization in explaining this similarity is explored as the subject of planned research. (Contains 57 references.) (SLD)

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School motivation and cultural context

An overview of research

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, San Diego, April 13-17, 1998

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This paper presents an overview of fifteen years of international study designed to determine the nature of motivational beliefs, values and goals held by students from different cultural groups, the compatability of these beliefs, values and goals with those promoted by classrooms and schools, and the impact individual, cultural/social, peer, family, class and school influences have on student motivation, achievement and school retention. The work has been disseminated through the following international journals: American Educational Research Journal, Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology, Journal of Intercultural Studies, Australian Journal of Education, Journal of American Indian Education, Cross-Cultural Research and Educational and Psychological Measurement.

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Introduction

Little is really known about the range of achievement values, goals and beliefs that are most salient to students from diverse cultural backgrounds in mainstream Western schools. For many of these children the language of the home is not English, and the culture of the home reflects the parents' culture of origin. Consequently, these children are brought up in a culturally different environment until they first go to school. A potential mismatch between values supported by teachers and schools, and the goal orientations, beliefs and values held by students developed through socialization practices within families and cultural communities, has significant implications for student motivation, absenteeism, achievement and retention as well as their intentions to complete further education (see, for example, Ladson-Billings, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Stokes, 1997). Currently there is little 'scientific' information on what children from different cultural backgrounds value in their schooling, the goals they seek, and what gives purpose to their learning. Much policy and practice in education either ignores this issue and treats all children the same, or bases practices on stereotypical views of what 'other' children 'are like'. Among the aims of the research program reported here is to determine the salient values and goals that students from diverse cultural backgrounds hold, how these are developed in the context of cultural background, family, society and school, and how they are related to school motivation and achievement.

Theoretical background

The research is embedded within a theoretical literature dealing with achievement motivation, especially that relating to goal theory, which has been very productive in stimulating research within the United States (e.g., Ames ,1992; Blumenfeld, 1992; Covington, 1992; Maehr & Anderman, 1993; McInerney, 1992, 1994; 1995; McInerney, Roche, McInerney, & Marsh, 1997; McInerney & Sinclair, 1991, 1992; McInerney & Swisher, 1995; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993; Schunk, 1996; Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1991).

Many school systems today tend to reward children for achievement behaviours that conform to "standards" reflecting Western values. It is commonly believed that cultural minority children may be poorly motivated to achieve at school because both schools and classrooms stress goals that are incompatible with their cultural values (James, Chavez, Beauvais, Edwards & Oetting, 1995; Kirkness & Bowman, 1992; Ledlow, 1992; Yates, 1987). The term **goals** refers to the different purposes that students may have in various achievement situations which guide their behaviour, cognition, and motivation as they become involved in academic work. Two types of goals have received considerable attention from researchers in

this area. **mastery goals** (also called task or learning goals), and **performance goals** (also called extrinsic goals). Central to a mastery goal is the belief that individual effort leads to success, and that learning has intrinsic value. With a mastery goal, individuals are oriented toward developing new skills, trying to understand their work, improving their level of competence, or achieving a sense of mastery. Mastery goals and achievement are "self-referenced". In contrast, central to a performance goal is a focus on one's ability relative to others. Ability is shown by doing better than others, by surpassing norms, or by achieving success with little effort. Public recognition for doing better than others through grades, rewards and approval from others, is an important element of performance goal orientation. Performance goals and achievement are, therefore, "other referenced" such that, "self-worth" is determined by one's perception of ability to perform and compete successfully relative to external criteria. Hence, when a student tries hard without being completely successful (in terms of the established norms), his or her sense of self-worth is threatened and motivation for learning is reduced.

In Western educational settings, both mastery and performance goals have traditionally focussed on individual achievement of goals. Little attention has been paid to group orientations such as working to preserve in-group integrity, interdependence of members and harmonious relationships. This social dimension of schooling (which includes the influence of parents, teachers and peers) may interact with both mastery and performance goals, and be extremely influential in affecting children's attitudes towards schooling in general, and to learning in particular. Furthermore, students may hold multiple goals such as a desire to please parents, to be important in the peer group, or to preserve their cultural identity, each of which may impact upon their level of motivation for particular tasks in school settings. Indeed, these multiple goals interact providing a complex framework of motivational determinants of action.

The literature posits a number of opposing values and goals of children coming from Western societies (often classified as Individualist societies) and those coming from non-Western societies (often classified as Collectivist societies) (see for example, Cuch, 1987; Deyhle, 1989, 1992; Fergusson, Lloyd & Horwood, 1991; Fogarty & White, 1994; Giles, 1985; Platero, Brandt, Witherspoon & Wong, 1986; Sanders, 1987; Stokes, 1997; Tharp, Dalton & Yamauchi, 1994; Tippeconnic, 1983; Yates, 1987). It is commonly believed that indigenous children, for example, such as those from Aboriginal, Navajo, Yavapai and Betsiamite communities, are less likely to be motivated by individually oriented goals such as mastery and performance, and more likely to be motivated by social goals that reflect their need to maintain group allegiance and solidarity. This affiliative motive is also presumed to be very important to Asian and Arabic background children. Furthermore, it is believed that many

indigenous minority children are both past and present oriented, and hence do not set goals for the future. Their valuing of tradition encourages them to see little point in change, while their belief in the need to maximise and enjoy their present life means that they see no purpose in investing effort and time for an anticipated future. Indeed, for the traditional American Indian, for example, thinking too much about the future is considered a taboo (McInerney, McInerney, Ardington & DeRachewiltz, 1997). As a consequence of this it is believed that these children seek gratification in the form of immediate payback for what they achieve rather than delaying gratification for the satisfaction of some future need. The research support for many of these contentions is very limited. The series of studies discussed in this paper, therefore, set out to discover some "hard data" on the determinants of motivation for a variety of cultural groups in mainstream school settings. Guiding questions for the research are:

1. Are the goals derived from achievement goal theory relevant to individuals from a range of cultural groups within cross-cultural school settings?
2. What are the most important goals of motivation for these groups, and how do these relate to extant literature?
3. How do these goals relate to important criteria of school motivation and achievement such as school confidence, perceived value of school, school satisfaction, desired occupation after leaving school, academic achievement, absenteeism and intention to complete schooling for these cultural groups?
4. What goals are emphasised by classrooms and schools in relation to the nature of school tasks set, the distribution and sharing of authority, the nature of reward and recognition, the nature of evaluation, the use of grouping and time to complete tasks? What are their differential impact on student motivation and achievement in the context of cultural differences?
5. What goals are emphasised by parents from different cultural groups, do these relate to goals drawn from goal theory; and what are their impact on student motivation and achievement in school settings?
6. What goals are emphasised by peers from different cultural groups, do these relate to goals drawn from goal theory; and what are their impact on student motivation and achievement in school settings?

Psychometric studies

The notion of achievement-motivation is difficult to operationalize psychometrically in cross-cultural settings if one is restricted to a generalized universal construct (i.e., everyone is presumed to be motivated by the same goals, irrespective of cultural background, which has been termed an etic approach), or to a particularistic view (i.e., motivation is group specific, and there are no generalities, which has been termed an emic approach). The dilemma of analyzing what are universal qualities of human behavior (therefore allowing some comparison across groups) and what are culturally specific qualities (therefore paying attention to the distinctiveness of groups) has been termed the etic-emic dilemma in cross-cultural research (Church & Katigbak, 1988a, 1988b; Segal, 1986). While attempting to elicit broadly comparable information from the groups surveyed over the course of this research (what might be termed the etic component of the research), considerable effort has been taken to ensure its emic validity. In particular, care has been taken to ensure that shared meanings could be attributed to both the methodology and the survey items and scales (McInerney, Roche, McInerney & Marsh, 1997; McInerney, McInerney & Roche, 1994, 1995; McInerney & Sinclair, 1991; McInerney, 1992, 1995, 1998).

Two primary approaches have been adopted to ensure the emic and etic validity of the psychometric data. First, prior to the psychometric studies, qualitative data was gathered through interviews and surveys on how the various cultural groups involved in the research conceptualized education and what they perceived as major issues in the motivation of their children in school settings. These conceptualizations are consistent with the items presented in each of the questionnaires used in the studies. Before use in each cultural setting the psychometric instruments were also subjected to the scrutiny of community members for cultural relevance/irrelevance. In each case a consultative group from within the cultural setting vetted the research for its cultural appropriateness. Second, in order to derive and validate psychometric scales for each of the groups independently, survey items were subjected to exploratory factor analysis to determine what might be termed the "emic scales". The results of these analyses are reported in the research literature. Three survey instruments derived from these analyses have been used, namely, the Inventory of School Motivation, which deals with goals, values, and the sense of self components of motivation; the Facilitating Conditions Questionnaire which deals with environmental pressures on school motivation, such as family, peer, and teacher influences, and finally the Behavioural Intentions Questionnaire, which deals with perceived consequences, norms, values, and affect, and how these affect

educational motivation. Confirmatory factor analysis has also been used for the Inventory of School Motivation and the Facilitating Conditions Questionnaire in order to determine what might be termed "etic scales", that is scales that have broad applicability across a range of cultural groups. These scales have recently been used to examine the motivational profiles of each of the groups in the various studies, any within and between group differences, and the relationship of the scales to achievement outcome measures (Hinkley & McInerney, 1998, McInerney, Roche, McInerney & Marsh, 1997).

Qualitative studies

Interview schedules. The survey studies referred to above did not examine the genesis of the achievement goals and values students held, whether these goals change over time, and if so how, whether there is a movement from traditional cultural values to Westernised values as students move through a Westernised school setting, or whether some students maintain traditional goals and values while others combine the traditional and Western. In other words, these earlier studies did not consider *ontological* and *change processes*. A consideration of these processes forms an important component of my present studies.

In order to address the research questions on the genesis of values and goals and how these change as children progress through school systems, longitudinal qualitative studies have been inaugurated. The major tool to elicit data is through individual semi-structured interviews. Through the use of an in-depth semi-structured interview format a richer understanding of important issues can be gained, in particular: How students from varying cultural backgrounds interpret themselves and their world; their affective reactions to schooling; what they consider of primary and secondary significance; and, how they build connections between life events which influence their sense of self, achievement and motivation within school settings. This more holistic approach provides important clues to understanding the process of adopting and maintaining/rejecting particular goal and value orientations within the school context, as well as the cognitive and affective factors involved. The specific issues which guided the design of the interview schedule are listed below.

1. How beliefs, values and goal orientations are formed.

2. Whether students who hold specific beliefs, values and goal orientations (e.g., mastery, performance, social) maintain these regardless of the environments in which they find themselves.

3. Whether there is a perception of having made a choice or commitment to particular beliefs, values and goal orientations.

4. The coping strategies used by students to sustain their beliefs, values and goal orientations in a variety of settings including the school, or whether they experience conflict and change their strategies.

5. Whether beliefs, values and goal orientations and strategy use are stable across domains (achievement, social, etc.) and over time.

6. The salience of different contexts (family, peers, school, community) at different times over the period of the research..

7. How beliefs, values and goal orientations, or changes in these, as well as the cultural/social influences in their lives, affect school motivation and achievement.

To this point in time the researcher has interviewed Navajo students, teachers, parents and community members at both Window Rock and Kayenta, and Yavapai and Anglo students at Fountain Hills, as well as community members and teachers. Interviews are planned for a range of other groups including Australian Aboriginal, Anglo, Arabic, and Vietnamese communities. Interviews last up to forty minutes and are tape recorded. Each of the tape recorded interviews is then transcribed and content analysed using the NUD.IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing) program. The NUD.IST program was selected as appropriate for this qualitative data as it assists in the management of a thorough and systematic analysis of large quantities of qualitative data. Preserving the naturalistic quality of the data was of paramount concern, therefore the transcripts were only minimally edited.

Key concepts (nodes) emerging from the data were constructed as a 'tree' which allows for detailed conceptual linking of related phrases or concepts through indexing and coding of each text (interview) according to these concepts (nodes). Text is then examined and indexed to one or more of these to facilitate further analysis.

In all cases respondents to the interviews have also completed the psychometric survey forms which enables me to compare each in order to ascertain the convergence between the two.

Participants

I have been very fortunate to have received the support of a number of cultural groups for this research. The participants include 496 Aboriginal students, 1173 Anglo Australian students, 487 Immigrant-background Australian students, 919 Navajo students, 141 Arabic-background Australian students, 198 Betsiamite Canadian Indian students, 1078 Anglo American students,

and 80 Yavapai students. The students attend broadly equivalent grades in High Schools teaching mainstream curricula.

A Brief Overview of Findings

As this is an overview of a long period of research the results and conclusions are multifaceted. A major finding from the psychometric studies suggests that, rather than being significantly different, the motivational profiles of these diverse cultural groups are strikingly similar. A narrow range of achievement goals and sense of self variables appear important in explaining school achievement on educational criteria. Furthermore, goals and values that are stereotypically used to distinguish between Western and indigenous groups (such as affiliation and social concern) do not appear to be salient in the school contexts studied. Similarly, factors which have been considered important by many as key determinants of indigenous minority student's poor achievement and dropping out of school, such as the supposed mismatch between the school's goals and values and the student's goals and values are, in general, not supported by the findings. What clearly emerge as important predictors of student retention and academic performance are values, beliefs and goals relating to sense of self, mastery and intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation. More specifically, these are to do with the students' self esteem at school (feeling good about themselves as students) and sense of purpose (having a goal of doing well at school and getting ahead in life); striving for excellence and improvement in their work and being intrinsically motivated; and working for rewards. Also emerging from the psychometric analyses is the clear finding that parental support is a major determinant of student academic motivation across all groups. Furthermore, the degree to which students value education for its instrumental purpose is strongly related to academic achievement across all groups (McInerney, 1991ab, 1992, 1994, 1995, in press; McInerney & McInerney, 1996; McInerney, Roche, McInerney, Marsh, 1997; McInerney & Sinclair, 1991, 1992; McInerney & Swisher, 1995).

These results are tempered by analyses of the qualitative studies which suggest the complexity of forces operating in determining motivation at school and in particular, for the indigenous groups, the shifting value orientations that occur as these groups attempt, on the one hand, to preserve cultural traditions, while on the other hand, seek to modernise through education in which alternative and sometimes competing values are seen to have a place. Important influences on student motivation clearly emerging from the qualitative studies are parental and community support, norms and role beliefs of students that it is "appropriate" for them to be successful at school, their liking and valuing of school, access to models of successful schooling (either students, parents, or community members who do well at school

and influence the student), and the socio-economic status of the communities (McInerney, McInerney, Ardington & De Rachewiltz, 1997; McInerney, McInerney, Ardington & Bazeley, 1998)

The dimensions of the Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) utilized in quantitative studies conducted earlier were also critically evaluated by the interviewees for cultural relevance and perceived importance in predicting school motivation and success. All dimensions of the ISM were considered culturally relevant. Dimensions that were considered most important to determining students' level of motivation were: Task (intrinsic motivation) and sense of purpose. These qualitative results confirm the results of the psychometric studies.

Future research directions

School systems tend to reinforce children for achievement behaviour that conforms to "standards" that reflect Western values. Therefore, the results indicating the salience of common goals to school achievement for the indigenous minority students and non-indigenous students in these studies begs the question as to whether academic achievement could be enhanced in other more culturally appropriate ways e.g., by developing learning structures that are more consonant with cultural values (see, for example, McInerney, 1991, 1995; McInerney & McInerney, 1996, in press). The findings clearly indicate that some children from the minority cultural groups appear to be effectively socialized into what it means to be a student in Western schools with all that this implies in terms of the nature of the tasks, valuing of individualistic or cooperative work, setting of goals, acquiring attitudes to school work and rewards. These earlier studies left me with the following questions: Why do some children from minority cultural groups appear to successfully cross the cultural boundaries and do well at school while others fail? Are sense of self factors and achievement goals related to a child's perception of his or her role as a student within a school setting, rather than being related to specific cultural values, which may be relatively unimportant in a school setting? Can, and (if so) how do, some children operate effectively at school while also maintaining strong cultural ties and values? These questions need attention through carefully designed qualitative and quantitative research.

As this research progresses I am becoming more refined in my approach, and in particular, I am reanalysing earlier data with the value of hindsight gained from the more recent studies. While at the gross level earlier findings remain substantiated in these later reanalyses, more fine grained findings are beginning to emerge. In the current studies participants in the interviews have also completed the psychometric surveys and so it is possible to do a molar analysis of each individual's psychometric data and to compare this with their interview data.

This enables me to blend the strengths of both the psychometric and qualitative approaches to gain a much clearer picture of the salient values and goals of students from different cultural backgrounds, and how these are formed and transformed through life events.

Finally, I am coming to the conclusion that schooling is a context that is "pan cultural" or, putting it another way, schooling is a second culture for all students (anglo, minority, indigenous) into which some students are more effectively socialised than others (many anglo students don't prosper at school). Basically, schooling requires the development of new social, cognitive, and motivational attributes in all children - however, some children become socialised more easily than others. The question is why? I don't believe that the answer lies in cultural differences per se. These are of course important, but not the essential reason why many children do not thrive at school (there are too many successful cross-cultural groups in school settings for this really to be plausible). An analogy can also be drawn with SES as a predictor of school achievement. Again, many low SES students thrive in schooling and use it to get ahead. So SES, in and of itself, does not explain why some children are successful and others are not. Once we dispense with cultural differences as the essential reason for lack of success (and also SES perhaps) we can examine the real issues - e.g., schooling processes that are really dysfunctional for lots of children across lots of groups. I still need to become more refined in my analyses of the very rich data I have, so that I can be more definitive that cultural differences don't really make the difference. Let me know what you think.

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